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MI 780 POSTMODERN MISSION

Professor: Michael A. Rynkiewicz
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Asbury Theological Seminary

Course Level, Prerequisites and Limits

This course is an advanced class in the area of Mission Theology, History and Practice (MI). Prerequisites are MB 700 and MI 700, or written permission by the instructor. The course offers three (3) units of credit and meets for three hours each week. The course will be conducted as a seminar with lecture, discussion and student presentations, and thus will be limited to 20 students.

Course Description

The title, Postmodern Mission, is purposely and delightfully ambiguous: a blurred genre. This leaves open the possibility of addressing the way in which postmodernism has affected mission, or of asking how we can be in mission to postmodern people. In fact, the course attempts both agendas. There has been a major shift in thinking in the Western world during the last few decades centred on a critique of modern culture; the culture that is based on the Enlightenment and the revolution in science. There is a critical skepticism about the claims of modernity; especially the claim that increasing rationality in the science project will lead to progress, ethical behaviour, freedom, equality and all around happiness. Modernism is suspect in that some of these goals have been met for some people, but not all for all people. That implies that race, gender and other markers of 'otherness' still count when knowledge becomes power and power corrupts. Some Christians resist postmodernism on the grounds that it is relativistic, pluralistic and nihilistic in the extreme. Others point out that, as Christians, they share some of the postmodern concerns about modernity, particularly modernity's penchant for materialism, consumerism, hedonism and oppression. In any case, things are changing. New perspectives and new narratives will affect how we understand mission and how we do mission. This course will explore these changes as they affect the spread of the gospel and the growth of the Kingdom.

Course Objectives

It is anticipated that the student in this course will develop the following competencies:

1. To be able to understand the differences between premodern, modern, and postmodern and post-colonial ways of thinking and doing as meta-cultural and meta-historical practices.
2. To be able to dialogue about these issues with a reasonable control of the appropriate authors and literature, assumptions and conclusions, and theories and theologies of mission.
3. To develop skills for analyzing arguments about truth claims, rationality, relativism, pluralism, hegemony, race, gender, power, colonialism, evangelism and mission.
4. To develop exegetical and hermeneutic skills for interpreting and using Biblical narratives in light of the postmodern critique.
5. To develop skills in the appropriate positioning of the gospel with respect to the present critique of all grand narratives and attempts to define and control reality.

Required Reading

1. *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts: Affirming Truth in a Modern/Postmodern World*. By Paul G. Hiebert. 1999 Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International. A small book with chapters on “The Epistemological Foundations of Positivism,” “The Epistemological Challenges of Instrumentalism and Idealism,” and “Critical Realism: A Way Ahead.”
2. *The Truth about The Truth: De-confusing and Re-constructing the Postmodern World*. Edited by Walter Truett Anderson. 1995 New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam. A reader presenting and critiquing postmodernism with articles by Isaiah Berlin, Umberto Eco, Vaclav Havel, Jacques Derrida, Kenneth Gergen, Maureen O’Hara, Michel Foucault, Stanley Krippner, Martin Marty, Richard Rorty, Howard Gardner, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Robert Jay Lifton, Jean Baudrillard, Charles Jencks, Thomas S. Kuhn, Pauline Marie Rosenau, Bell Hooks, Paul Feyerabend, Ernest Becker, Roy Wagner, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, and others.
3. *Anabaptists and Postmodernity*. Edited by Susan Biesecker-Mast and Gerald Biesecker-Mast. 2000 Telford, PA: Pandora Press U.S. A reader from a particular Christian tradition engaging postmodernism. Articles by Stanley Hauerwas, Peter Blum, Thomas Finger, Michael King, Paul Tiessen, John Roth, Scott Holland, Hildi Froese Tiessen, Jeff Gundy, John Richard Burkholder, Marlene Kropf, J. Denny Weaver, Douglas Jacobsen, Gerald Schlabach, John Stahl-Wert, Chris Huebner, Thomas Heilke, Leo Driedger and others.
4. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Ngugi wa Thiong’o. A provocative book by a Kenyan (Gikuyu) novelist and playwright who has been on the outs with both the British colonial regime and the independent government. This book should give a feeling of why Two-Thirds World intellectuals might be angry. (Note: You are advised that there is some vulgar language on p. 82; You are not required to read Section VIII which begins on page 80 and continues to page 82.)
5. *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations*. By R. S. Sugirtharajah. 1998 Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. A book that raises the issue of hermeneutics from a non-western perspective that will challenge the students to hear other voices on something central to Christianity. Brings “orientalism,” colonialism, history, oppression and power into the discussion.
6. *The Recovery of Mission: Beyond the Pluralist Paradigm*. By Vinoth Ramachandra. 1996 Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. A book examining Indian thinking about Christianity and mission that engages both a western and an eastern tradition in ways that move beyond the simple pluralism of American liberal theology.

Course Requirements

1. *Attend class regularly.* Class is a commitment and can become a community, but only if students attend and participate. This is primarily a discussion class, so your presence and participation counts.
2. *Read the weekly assignments.* The assignments provide the focus for the class discussions. Read, take notes, decide what is most important and what is most confusing in the readings, and be prepared to enter the dialogue. This is what critical engagement of the readings is about.
3. *Critical Reflection Papers.* A brief review of the literature will be due at the beginning of each week in order to assure that the students have been engaged with the readings.
4. *Make class presentations.* Reading and reflecting is one thing, but praxis is another, so students will be asked to demonstrate engagement with the ideas by presenting a line of argument in class. This will be done by the student leading discussion of particular readings.
5. *Write Essays.* Each essay should be about ten to fifteen pages, double spaced. The essays should show engagement with the literature in that: the research behind the essay is clear (referenced), a wide range of appropriate literature has been consulted, the variety of positions taken on the issue is clear, and the student has taken a position and has defended it well. References and bibliography will follow the style of the journal *Missiology*.
 - a. *First essay:* What is postmodernism and how is it relevant to Christianity and missiology? Include in the discussion the concepts of premodern, modern, colonial and postcolonial.
 - b. *Second essay:* How does a particular author among our texts and particular theory critique mission theory, and, as a result, what new model of mission would better serve the mission of God?

Course Evaluation

30% Critical Reflection Papers. (6 books x 5)
10% Class Presentations. (1 time of leading discussion x 10)
30% First Essay. (30)
30% Second Essay. (30)

COURSE GRADING

The unit of credit is a semester hour, which is defined as one hour of classroom work per week for one semester, or its equivalent. The 4.00 point system is used to compute grade point standing. The grading system is:

A	4.00	Exceptional work: surpassing, markedly outstanding achievement of course objectives.
B	3.00	Good work: strong, significant achievement of course objectives.
C	2.00	Acceptable work: basic, essential achievement of course objectives.
D	1.00	Marginal work: inadequate, minimal achievement of course objectives.
F	0	Unacceptable work: failure to achieve course objectives.

INCOMPLETE WORK

The official end of each term is 4:00 p.m. on the last day of the examination schedule. This hour is the deadline for handing in all course work. Each instructor may set an earlier deadline for submission of any or all course work. The student must petition the faculty person involved and the student's advisor for permission to receive an "I" at the end of the semester.

A grade of "I" denotes that the work of a course has not been completed due to an unavoidable emergency, which does not include delinquency or attending to church work or other employment. If the work of a course is incomplete at the end of a term without an emergency, a letter grade will be given based on the grades of work done, with incomplete work counted as "F."

Incomplete grades shall be removed one calendar month prior to the close of the following semester unless an earlier date is designated by the Office of the Chief Academic Officer on the individual petition. If the work is not completed by the time designated, the "I" shall be changed to an "F" unless a passing grade can be given based on work already completed or unless special permission is granted by the Chief Academic Officer.

Professors are required to give either a grade or an "I," if approved, to each student registered for credit in a course. Students with Incompletes in two or more classes will not be allowed to enroll in a new semester or term without permission from their Dean.

OFFICE HOURS

Office hours will be Wednesday and Thursday 1:00-2:30 p.m. It is best to make an appointment in advance, but you may check during hours to see if others have not taken a time slot. Other times may be available by appointment. My office is in the ESJ School on the third floor of the McPheeters Centre, Room 308. Telephone: 858-2218

Course Schedule

Fall Semester, 2004.

Classes begin September 7. There are 13 weeks, excluding Reading Week (November 22-26) and Finals Week. Classes end December 10. Finals week is December 13-17.

Week 1: Introduction. What is meant by the concepts of premodern, modern, and postmodern? What does it mean to look at the world a different way?

Week 2: Ontology, epistemology and hermeneutics.
Reading: Hiebert.

Week 3: What is involved in the postmodern critique?
Readings: Anderson.

Week 4: Continue.
Readings: Anderson

Weeks 5: Continue.
Reading: Anderson

Weeks 6: What relationships exist between Christianity and modernity, or postmodernity?
Reading: Biesecker-Mast and Biesecker-Mast.

Week 7: Continue.
Reading: Biesecker-Mast and Biesecker-Mast.

Week 8: What is postcolonialism? What might it mean for mission?
Reading: Thiong'o

Weeks 9:
Reading: Thiong'o

Week 10: How can an alternative reading of the times affect our interpretations of Scripture, Christianity and mission?
Reading: Sugirtharajah.

Week 11: Continue:
Reading: Sugirtharajah.

Week 12: Reading Week.

Week 13: Can we recover mission in the church when pluralism and relativism set the standards all around us without reviving cultural imperialism?
Reading: Ramachandra.

Week 14: Continue. Ramachandra,

Week 15: Finals Week.